Second Time's the Charm

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Second Time's the Charm

by orderlychaos

Summary

Leo Fitz was no expert -- he left the biological things to Jemma after all -- but he was pretty sure the body lying against the wall was lying in a pool of his own blood and that could not be a good sign.

Fitz's second ever field mission turns out a little differently than the first.

In which there is hand holding, awkwardness from Ward and much sass and destruction from Clint and Natasha.

Notes

I wrote this after being inspired by this weeks Agents of SHIELD episode (1x07). It was actually supposed to have more references to Clint and Natasha not needing extraction than it ended up having, so oops? Also, I haven't ever actually had yaks milk, so I apologise if I'm making it sound a lot worse than it actually tastes.

Leo Fitz tried really hard to ignore the metallic trace of blood hanging in the air underneath the acrid scent of smoke. He was no expert -- he left the biological things to Jemma after all -- but he was pretty sure the body lying against the wall was lying in a pool of his own blood and that could not be a good sign. "Ward?" Leo hissed, creeping closer to the other agent and resisting the urge to reach out and grab a handful of Ward's shirt. "Are you sure there are no terrorists hiding somewhere ready to shoot us?"

Ward turned back to shoot Leo a dark look and a frown. Leo shrugged helplessly, cursing himself for finding Ward and his stupid, perfect cheekbones so attractive. "You said it yourself," Ward replied, a hint of irritation in his voice. "There were only two people left in the building and they were heading in the opposite direction."

"Yes, well," Leo hedged, because he *had* said that. "I just don't think it was the terrorists slitting each others throats and… oh my God, I think that body only has one arm!"

Leo's second field mission was going about as well as the first, which was to say that he and Ward were on their own, off comms and had discovered things weren't going to plan almost as soon as they'd infiltrated the right building. The compound belonged to a terrorist group with links to HYDRA and several other nasty organisations and the device Leo had been sent to retrieve would be completely dangerous if any one of those organisations got their hands on it which was why Leo and Ward had spent eight freezing, miserable hours hiking towards it and Leo wasn't sure if he was annoyed or grateful someone had mostly destroyed the whole building before they'd gotten there.

Ward's frown deepened. "Fitz," he said quietly. "You were the one who wanted to come on this mission. I could have brought back the device…"

"I know, I know," Leo muttered. "I'm fine. We're good. Let's go."

Continuing on down the corridor, Leo pretended not to notice all the dead bodies lying around because they were making Leo more than a little nervous. There were very few people who could take out an *entire compound of terrorists* without anyone else noticing and all of them were scary. Finally reaching the remains of the lab on the lower floors they'd been looking for, Ward motioned for Leo to stay where he was while he went in and cleared the room. Leo didn't particularly want to be left alone, but he was SHIELD agent, so he nodded to Ward and tried not to fidget. Besides, it wasn't any worse than South Ossetian separatists and he'd survived that just fine.

The scent of blood was thicker now and Leo was studiously not noticing the dark red that was probably a spray of blood on the wall next to him. When he heard the scuff of a boot on the concrete floor on his other side, Leo whirled around, his heart suddenly in his throat. Ward stared back at him for a moment. Leo let himself sag in relief. "Didn't you mother ever tell you it's rude to sneak up on people?" Leo hissed, irritated now that the surge of fear had passed -- he just wasn't sure if he was more angry with himself for being scared or Ward for being so ridiculously competent.

“The lab’s clear,” Ward said in reply, because strong-and-silent was a good description of what Ward was like in the field -- and his general personality, really.

“Okay,” Leo said, hurrying into the lab and slinging his backpack off his shoulder so he could get at his tools. “I’m going to need about five minutes to disconnect the power source…”

Ward nodded. “Just… hurry,” he said, proving he was as weirded out as Leo by everything.

Leo blinked at him for a moment, before nodding. When Ward turned back to watch the door, Leo shook himself out of his thoughts and got down to business. Daydreaming over Ward was not something he should be doing in the middle of a mission -- Leo could easily reflect on the breadth of Ward’s shoulders and Ward’s general impulse to put himself between Leo and danger when they were back on the Bus. Besides, he needed most of his focus to disarm the potentially tricky circuits surrounding the power cell and the fact that he was pretty sure it was connected directly to the trigger. Not that Leo had exactly figured out what the device was supposed to do yet -- he was just sure that if terrorists had it, the effects would not be pleasant.

Leo was just disconnecting the final wires when the entire building was rocked by the force of a very large explosion. Clutching his tools in one hand and the device in the other, Leo looked at Ward with wide eyes. “What was that?” he asked.

“An explosion,” Ward said, stating the obvious. “Time to leave.”

Hearing the sudden sound of gunfire in the distance, Leo hurried to put the device in the containment unit Leo had designed for it and pretended not to notice that his hands were shaking. Leo thought he was getting pretty good at the not noticing of things. Shoving the rest of his gear into his backpack, Leo climbed to his feet and staggered over to where Ward was waiting by the door, gun in hand. The gunfire sounded like it was getting closer and Leo wasn’t sure he liked that possibility very much. “Come on,” he told Ward, moving to the door.

Leo bit back a sigh as Ward immediately put his hand on Leo’s chest, before moving out into the corridor and motioning for Leo to follow. Leo knew that Ward was just doing his job and protecting him, but sometimes Leo wished Ward didn’t think he was completely helpless. A second later, a loud, piercing alarm began blaring and Leo winced at the noise. “Well that’s not a good sign!” he said.

Ward just frowned at him again. They started running down the corridor, Ward a little bit ahead of Leo and his gun out and steady. As he moved, the edge of the containment unit in his backpack dug into the space between Leo’s shoulder blades and he winced. The device was heavy, too. Maybe he should have taken Jemma’s advice and done a little more cardio before his mission. Darting around a corner, Leo almost tripped over his feet when three men opened a nearby door at exactly the same moment. Ward -- being Ward -- immediately stepped in front of Leo and raised his gun to shoot, but it turned out he didn’t have to. Faster than Ward could react, the terrorists went down, large black arrows protruding from vital body parts.

Whirling, Leo found a rough-looking man with dark blond hair standing behind them. He was dressed completely in black and still held a sleek recurve bow in one hand, which Leo was relieved to see wasn't loaded or nocked or whatever a bow was when it had an arrow in it. "Well," the man drawled. "This is a little unexpected."

Before Leo could ask who he was, the same door the men had come through crashed open again and two figures staggered out. Leo felt his jaw drop a little as he realised the realised that the redheaded woman was actually attempting to strangle the man *with her thighs*. She gave a sharp twist, making Leo wince, and then the man crumpled to the floor, dead. Even without the skintight black catsuit and the elaborate cuffs, Leo was pretty sure there was only one redhead who could take out an entire terrorist compound, strangle men with her thighs and have a partner who used an actual bow as a weapon. "Oh my God, it's the Black Widow," Leo hissed to Ward, pressing a little closer because he'd always been a bit scared of Natasha Romanoff. "And Hawkeye!"

"I can see that," Ward replied, eyeing both the other SHIELD agents warily. "What I don't know is what they're doing here."

"Perhaps we can discuss this later?" Agent Romanoff said, frowning a little. "We need to get out of here."

Ward nodded, all business except for the little line he had between his eyes. "Do you have an exfil plan?" he asked.

"Uh… get out alive?" Agent Barton replied.

Leo blinked, trying not to be terrified at the idea that Agent Barton didn't actually have a plan for getting out of the building. Beside him, Ward frowned again, before shooting Leo a glance. Leo hoped Ward wasn't about to say anything about the way Leo had his hand curled in the back of Ward's jacket, but Ward just turned back to Barton. "There's no one coming to extract you?" Ward said, a little incredulous.

Agent Romanoff shrugged. "We don't really need it," she said. "Barton and I are used to finding our own way out. We just need to get the device we came for first."

"Oh, I already have that," Leo told her before he could stop himself and found a pair of sharp green eyes assessing him. "It's contained, I promise," he added, suddenly nervous.

"You managed to disconnect the device but keep it intact?" Agent Romanoff said.

"Uh, yes?" Leo said. "Mostly? It's nothing I can't fix back in the lab anyway."

Agent Romanoff's lips quirked. "Impressive," she said.

Huffing as he walked over, Agent Barton rolled his eyes. "Great. That means we can leave, right?" he said. "I haven't had any coffee today and this whole country is so cold, I'm freezing my nuts off."

Leo had to agree. Who knew Romania would be so icey?

Agent Romanoff frowned at him. "I did offer you coffee this morning," she said.

Barton made a gagging face. "No, what you offered me was brown water mixed with half fermented yaks milk because you are secretly trying to kill me."

"Barton, if I wanted you dead, I would have killed you years ago and saved myself the whining," Agent Romanoff replied, but her eyes were fond and amused.

Leo glanced at Ward, who shrugged slightly. "Yaks milk is an… acquired taste," Ward said.

Barton grinned. "See? Ward agrees with me."

"You've drunk yaks milk before?" Leo said, still watching Ward. He wondered what kind of mission Ward had been on and then he remembered that Ward used to work alone and tightened his hand in Ward's jacket, because it seemed like a sad thing to be on a mission without anyone to complain to about the awful taste of yaks milk.

Ward shrugged slightly. "It was a long term mission in Kazakhstan…" he began, before something caught his attention and he tensed.

Leo hadn't realised how much Ward had relaxed into Leo's hand at his back until he felt Ward straightened. Glancing over, Leo saw Agents Barton and Romanoff had gone on the alert too, Barton with an arrow nocked on his string but not drawn and Agent Romanoff with both of her guns out. "This way," Agent Romanoff said, motioning down the corridor to their left.

She immediately started running down the corridor and Leo was forced to let go of Ward's jacket as he moved to follow her. Ward, not looking Leo in the face, reached down and grabbed Leo's hand. For a moment, Leo was frozen in surprise, before he snapped his thoughts together and tangled his fingers with Ward's. Risking a glance to his side, Leo was amazed to see a faint blush darkening Ward's cheeks as he tugged Leo in Agent Romanoff's direction, Agent Barton defending their rear.

A second later the reason for all the tension became clear as several more terrorists rounded the corridor behind them and immediately began shouting. Ward began running faster and Leo felt his heart somersault in his chest when Ward *didn't let go of his hand*. That felt like an important development. A burst of gunfire erupted behind them, the noise loud and jarring and Leo unconsciously squeezed Ward's hand tighter as his pulse jumped. There was a soft twanging sound behind them, but Leo didn't dare risk a look, trusting Barton to deal with the terrorists chasing them. "We need to get outside," Barton called out softly as they ducked around another corner. "Find a car or something."

"There's an exit two floors up and to the right," Ward said.

Agent Romanoff shot a look in their direction, or maybe in Barton's, before she shrugged slightly and turned to slam open the door to her right with an impressive kick. Leo absently wondered if Agent Romanoff had ever trained with Agent May because they both seemed to be the same inherently fearsome, stoic kind of badass. Moving to follow her, Ward tugged Leo behind him again and together they raced up the stairs Agent Romanoff had found. Two

flights and another kicked-open door, they emerged onto the ground floor of the compound and Leo immediately breathed a sigh of relief at being able to see windows. The floor itself appeared empty, aside from several dead bodies, but both Agent Romanoff and Barton seemed tense as they headed towards the windows to look outside.

"We've got… shit, at least ten soldiers coming up from the west," Barton reported.

"I count thirteen from the south," Agent Romanoff added.

Leo blinked because that hadn't been in the mission briefing. "Soldiers?" he echoed. "What? This is supposed to be a terrorist bunker. Shouldn't soldiers arriving be a good thing?"

Barton winced slightly as he made his way towards where Ward and Leo stood still holding hands. Leo was really, *really* beginning to appreciate Ward's strong, warm hand in his. In fact, Leo was hoping that there would be a lot more hand holding in his future because he would really like it if he got to hold Ward's hand in non-dangerous situations too. "Unfortunately these soldiers are working with the terrorists, so in this case, it's not really a good thing," Barton explained.

"Well, that seems like a very large thing for SHIELD to miss," Leo said. "I'm beginning to think the intel for this mission was seriously flawed."

Barton flashed him a sharp grin. "I realised that the second I saw you and Agent Ward," he said. "SHIELD doesn't usually send two teams in after the same thing. The analysts are definitely getting in trouble for this one."

"You can fantasise about Coulson yelling at people later," Agent Romanoff told Barton, making Leo jump as she appeared behind him. "Right now we need a way out of here."

Leo swallowed. "I may be able to help with that," he said. With great regret and reluctance, Leo let go of Ward's hand and slid off his backpack, trying to remember where he put what he was looking for as he rummaged. "It's like that incapacitation grenade you used in Peru," he said, glancing up at Ward. "Only it's designed to be thrown. I've been toying around with the… and that's not important right now. Ah ha!"

Ward looked as if he was almost thinking about smiling when Leo presented him with two of his new grenades. "Thanks," Ward said softly. "You can explain… the rest to me later, you know, if you wanted."

"Really?" Leo replied, blinking. "Even though you always complain that I don't speak English even though I use perfectly good words that Jemma always understands…"

Leo made an effort to stop his babbling when he saw the way Ward wasn't looking at him anymore. "No, I'd like that," he said immediately, hoping Ward wasn't about to take back his offer. "If you don't get anything, I can always explain that too."

Ward glanced up again, smiling faintly. The expression wasn't large, but it was enough to make Leo a little weak at the knees because he'd *made Ward smile*. "Yeah, that would…

I…" Trailing off, Ward cleared his throat. "We can probably use these on the soldiers and head east towards the forest," he said, walking over to Agent Romanoff and handing her one of the grenades.

Leo blushed when he caught Agent Barton grinning at him. A second later, Barton flashed him a thumbs up. Leo was a little startled, yet also a little touched that he had an obvious ally in the awkward flirtation between him and Ward. At least Leo hoped that was how Ward flirted. Settling his backpack on his shoulders again, Leo eyed Barton carefully as the other agent sidled up to him. "Don't worry, Ward is totally watching you every time he thinks you won't catch him," Barton whispered. "He's just scared."

"How do you know that?" Leo asked, because Ward's expression was always so hard to read and the idea of Ward being scared of anything just didn't seem right.

Barton smiled and unlike his previous expressions, this one was soft and warm and reached his eyes. "Ward's got a good poker face, but I learned my way around one that was a lot harder to read," he said. "That and he looks at you the way I used to look at my husband."

Leo blinked, not sure if he was more shocked that Barton had a husband or that he was mentioning it so casually to Leo -- although that was mostly due to the rumours that Barton didn't want to settle down with any one person which were clearly wrong. "How did you used to look at your husband?" Leo whispered back. Then a thought struck him. "And why don't you look at him like that anymore?"

"I used to look at Phil like he was the best thing that had ever happened to my life but I was too terrified to reach out and take what I really wanted," Barton replied. Then he winked. "And the reason why I don't look at him like that anymore is because Phil reached back and now I know that he loves me as much as I love him."

Leo sighed because that was *exactly* what he wanted and was too scared to have, except maybe he didn't have to be too scared anymore. Maybe Ward was feeling all the same things. Then the name Barton had used sank into Leo's brain and he almost swallowed his own tongue. "Phil? But Agent Coulson's first name is…" Leo trailed off wide-eyed. "Oh my God," he breathed. "Things make so much more sense now."

Barton grinned, but whatever else he was about to say was interrupted by Agent Romanoff. "Barton, if you've finished gossiping, Ward and I have come up with a plan to get us out of here."

Huffing, Barton rolled his eyes at her. "Yeah, yeah," he said. "Fitz and I are coming."

They headed over to where Agent Romanoff and Ward were waiting on either side of a small door just in front of where the soldiers were converging on the building. Agent Romanoff outlined the plan in quick, efficient sentences and Leo made sure to pay enough attention to know that mostly all he had to do was hang back until Ward and Agent Romanoff disabled the soldiers, stay out of Barton's way as he covered them and then run like hell. Mostly, though, he just wanted to slip his hand back into Ward's, but he knew now was not the time for that.

“Ready?” Ward asked him softly when Agent Romanoff had finished.

Leo nodded. “Ready,” he replied.

Ward nodded back, before turning to Agent Romanoff. Leo watched as he nodded at her too, before Agent Romanoff kicked open the door and they sprinted outside. Barton immediately took their place as the soldiers began shouting outside, firing several arrows as a few of the soldiers went for their guns. As soon as they were in range, Ward and Agent Romanoff threw the grenades and Leo immediately started counting down the fuse in his head. Then Ward and Agent Romanoff both spun and began sprinting away from the soldiers, trying to get out of range and a second after Leo reached zero, a wave of blue light flared out from each of the grenades. The soldiers, all caught in the electromagnetic waves, crumpled to the ground, unconscious.

Grinning at the way his grenades had worked, Leo followed Barton outside, aiming for the trees to the side of the building and blinked when he heard the distinct sound of a car engine roaring towards him. Unsure if this was more soldiers coming to join their now unconscious fellows, Leo immediately began looking for something to hide behind, but it turned out he didn’t need too because the large black SUV that skidded to a halt in front of him had the SHIELD emblem covering its side and the familiar face of Agent May behind the wheel. When Leo also noticed who was sitting in the passenger seat, he glanced at Barton and offered his own wink.

“Can I offer anyone a ride?” Coulson said as he stepped out of the SUV, his gun drawn but pointed at the ground.

“Coulson,” Agent Romanoff greeted. She actually smiled when May stuck her head out of her half-open door. “Melinda.”

“Aww, honey, if I’d known you were going to be my extraction I would have worn tighter pants,” Barton said.

Ward looked a little startled at the comment, so Leo headed towards him, intent on explaining what he’d learned. Well, the part where Barton was married to Agent Coulson anyway. The rest of it was probably better conveyed by action and Leo could totally ask Ward out on a date. He could.

“I wasn’t aware you needed help with an extraction, Agent Barton,” Coulson replied, his eyes warm with amusement. “I’m just here to collect two members of my team.”

Barton pressed a hand to his chest. “That *hurts*, Coulson,” he said, but he was still grinning.

“Did you know,” Leo said, leaning close to Ward, “that Agent Coulson is married to Hawkeye?”

“I… what… he is?” Ward said. “Huh.”

Leo looked at him, puzzled. “Why? What did you think?”

Ward immediately blushed and looked away. "It's not…" he said.

"Ward," Leo replied, moving closer still and reaching out to grab Ward's hand again with both of his. When Ward still wouldn't look at him, Leo tried again. "*Grant*," he said.

"Hawkeye does have impressive… assets," Ward told him, finally glancing up, and Leo could see the way he was struggling with his normal poker face, his blush still covering those perfect cheekbones.

"Yeah, well, I prefer your assets," Leo said with a grin.

Ward's blush darkened, but he did look very pleased at Leo's words, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "Yeah?" he said.

"Yes," Leo said firmly.

Hands still tangled together, Leo and Ward turned back to the other agents in time to catch the tail end of the argument between Romanoff, Barton and Coulson about whether or not they could stop off in Paris on the way home because that's where they'd been intending to go anyway. Apparently, Agent Romanoff wanted to buy shoes and Barton was hungry for pastries. Leo was amused to note that Barton was doing most of his arguing from Coulson's shoulder, one of his arms curled tightly around Coulson's waist as Coulson watched him with an exasperated expression.

"Paris?" Leo said.

Agent Romanoff shrugged. "It's one of the benefits to planning your own extraction," she explained. "No one complains when you take the long way home via Paris and stop to do a little shopping on the way."

"Plus, it's romantic," Barton said with a grin. "We could totally stop there for the weekend. See the sights. Drink coffee…"

"Barton," Coulson began, but Barton just used his free hand to grab Coulson's tie and tug him forward.

"What, you don't think I'm worth a romantic weekend in Paris, Phil? You know that's not a good attitude to have for a successful, happy marriage…"

When Barton pulled Coulson in for a kiss, Agent Romanoff snorted and glanced at May. May rolled her eyes. Leo just smiled because Ward's hand was curled around his again and everything else seemed less important than that. Glancing away when the kiss in front of them turned a lot dirtier than Leo would ever have given Coulson credit for, Leo nudged Ward with his shoulder. "If we do go to Paris, we should go sightseeing or something," he said, pretending that his heart wasn't thumping loudly in his chest.

"Yeah," Ward said, his fingers tightening around Leo's. "We should."

Leo grinned.

Fin.

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